

It was cool and crisp that day, but Bartimaeus seemed unfazed, just sitting there, in hopeful anticipation. But then, I just can't imagine him as someone who was resigned in life. Well... you know... you've seen him. We have all walked past that pitiful blind beggar a million times. He is always there. Good old Bartimaeus. He has a good spot. The road is dusty, yes, but the traffic between Jericho and Jerusalem is brisk, and he's got his spot, just on the outskirts. Good place for him, on the outskirts; a good place for hopeful anticipation.

Bartimaeus just looked ready on that day. Maybe he woke up just knowing in his bones that something was about to change for him. Maybe the hum of the earth beneath his bare feet was more palpable that day. Maybe he could detect a different buzz in the air. I talked not long ago with a young man who had lost his vision slowly over time. He said that he hears and feels differently now. It isn't that he suddenly has supernatural powers, that he can hear or feel things he couldn't before. It's just that he is aware of sounds and aware of vibrations/textures that he wasn't when his eyes were working. This young man even has a phrase for this: "Your distractions are my attractions."

At any rate, good old Bartimaeus was just sitting there – with maybe a little more juice in his voice – with his cupful of hopeful anticipation when all of a sudden the crowd came. Before anyone nearby could make out who was coming or why, well that's when Bartimaeus starts in, just crying out, "Jesus, Jesus." How he knew that's who was coming I have never figured out. Well, I have never seen Bartimaeus so worked up. Usually his eyes are dull and searching, but not this day. His eyes still seemed to be searching, but also dancing and alive. His face was filled with joy. As the crowd around Jesus got closer and closer, ol' Bartimaeus just got louder and louder, and he seemed to glow brighter and brighter. Which is kinda hard to imagine. Bartimaeus always has been a "glass-half-full" kind of guy. But he was all aglow, kind of living into his name, maybe. Bartimaeus once told me that his name means, "Son of the most prized." I had always thought that name was more than a little ironic. But now... maybe not.

But then, I'm getting ahead of myself. Anyway, the friends around Jesus started shushing Bartimaeus. Well, maybe shushing is not strong enough. They were actually shouting at him to shut up. I didn't like it, but I really didn't want to get involved. And it really didn't matter anyway, because Bartimaeus had only one thing on his mind: Jesus. He just cried out even louder from his place on the outskirts, "Son of David, have mercy on me." Imagine that. He called Jesus "Son of David." He just seemed to know what Jesus is all about. The Son of David, the Messiah, the savior of all, this Jesus who was coming into his power in Jerusalem. Funny thing about it, though. Bartimaeus wasn't cheering Jesus onward to overthrow the Romans (like the rest of us). He was asking for mercy. Imagine. Old Bartimaeus, broken and battered and blind and begging old Bartimaeus, crying for mercy from the Messiah. He saw something the rest of us didn't, or wouldn't, or couldn't. He saw what Jesus is all about. Now there is more than a little irony: Bartimaeus saw.

And maybe that is why Jesus' followers were treating Bartimaeus so badly. They couldn't see what Bartimaeus saw. You remember that young man lost his sight slowly? He said another interesting thing to me. He said that now that he is blind bright light causes him pain. And he said that anytime he can hear or sense something that he longs to see with his eyes, he has physical pain. Maybe that is what was going on with these followers of Jesus; maybe they were reacting to the pain of their own blindness. "Their distraction was their attraction;" and it hurt.

But anyway... the most unexpected thing happened next. Jesus stopped suddenly. Right there in the middle of the road, right next to old Bartimeaus, he stopped. And this great calm

descended, and for a moment you could hear the beating of your own heart. It was that quiet. It reminded me of the story I heard about Jesus calming that storm on the sea. All that havoc, then... nothing. That quiet. That still. And Jesus said just a few words, but I won't ever forget them: "Call him here." Well, you should have seen those same men who were moments before just treating Bartimaeus so terribly were now slapping him on the back and making a path for him to Jesus. You know, with Jesus there just aren't any outskirts, there just aren't any margins.

Well, when Bartimaeus hears this calling he sprang up like he was sitting on fire. His cloak and all the things that mark him as a blind beggar went flying off, and Bartimaeus just stood before Jesus as a man, a man with searching and dancing eyes. Well, you know what Bartimaeus wanted. I know what Bartimaeus wanted. All God's children know what he wanted from Jesus. But Jesus just had to ask him, "What do you want me to create for you?" That is the word Jesus said: create. Well, if you were watching closely you would have seen Bartimeaus just melt. "Rabbouni," – "my teacher" he calls Jesus, like he's known the Messiah all his life – "Rabbouni, let me see again." Again. In all the time I've known Bartimeaus I never knew he could see before. I never knew he had sight at one point in his life. I never knew he had lost so much.

Now here is the truly strange part, at least for me. Jesus said, "Go, your faith has made you well," and then Bartimaeus suddenly could see with his eyes. Faith came first, and then the wholeness. Now I don't know about you, but for me it might easily have been the other way around: show me the miracle, and then I might believe. But not with old Bartimaeus. He had faith first, and that faith was what put him in Jesus' path, and that faith was what caught Jesus' ear, and that faith was what gave Bartimaeus the courage to ask for what he needed. The last I saw of Bartimaeus, well more than just his eyes were dancing. He was following Jesus, his Rabbouni, his mercy, on his way to Jerusalem.

This all was some time ago. But I can't shake the memory from my mind, and it haunts me sometimes, I tell you. That faith. I marvel at the faith that follows after losing everything. Where does that come from? Bartimaeus had sight, but then lost it. If that had been me I would have been tempted to resign myself to that loss. I would have defined myself by my incompleteness. And that would be it. I would go find a room somewhere and curl up in it. And I would nurture that sweet loss. You know, there is a strange and powerful satisfaction in resignation, in the giving up. But Bartimaeus went beyond resignation. He seemed to go through his loss, so that on that clear crisp morning he was where he needed to be to meet mercy coming down the road to Jerusalem.

I can't help but wonder at his ability to see what no one else could: that salvation was so close you could call out to it, and it to call you to follow. I look at our world around us and wonder at the blindness when healing and hope are so near. Our world seem to be occupied by a great power. Some blame Rome, but this is much greater than any empire. Our world lives under the tyranny of fear. Our world is so afraid of losing anything that in the process we are losing everything that matters. And we dare not see. Remember the pain of the young man who yearned to see, but could not. Perhaps our world just doesn't want that pain. We don't want the pain of our own blindness yearning to really see. The tendency is to turn away from the brightness. But as I look back on Bartimaeus I am convinced that the only way to be made whole, the only way to really see, is to engage the loss in our lives and in our world – the broken and begging parts of ourselves – and work through until we can find in faith mercy standing with us. Bartimaeus just knew that Jesus was the source of what he lacked, and he just knew with the knowledge that only loss can bring that Jesus would not leave him wanting.

It seems to me that Bartimaeus only got this knowledge by seeing himself as he really was, a beloved child of God, and seeing that God made him to be full and whole. Bartimaeus saw before he could see. You and I, well, we have to do the same. We are also God's beloved children, and need to see ourselves in all our broken glory, and know deep down – by engaging in our loss – that God wants us whole and full as well. This seems to be true vision. It is the vision that led a blind man to a certain road on a certain day in faith to find and follow the source of all healing, Jesus Christ. He is calling us. He is calling our world. May we see, that we may see.